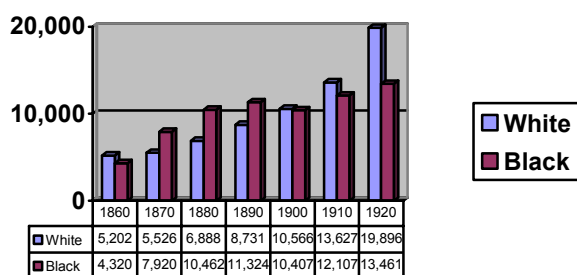


purpose, and duty.” A review of the census for Whitesboro and Cape May County in 1900 and 1910 reveals the names of many African Americans born in North Carolina who had relocated the region. Further, many of those listed can be tied to Wilmington roots. Surnames such as Sadgwar, Fales, Yarborough, Green, Scott, Spaulding, Pearsall, and Merrick all have clear ties to Wilmington. One banished man, McClain Lofton, is found in Cape May in 1910.²⁶

The initial shock to the economic system for the African American community was overcome by those who remained and rebuilt an infrastructure that supported the black community from within. Difficult to document, but evident from study of city directory and census data, is a small influx of African American workers into the city following the turn of the century.²⁷

**Wilmington Population
by Race**



With the help of new and old residents, black businesses developed in

predominantly black neighborhoods and catered to black customers. The community clusters became self-contained, self-supporting units of interdependence and sustainability for their residents. As recalled by one longtime resident of the city, black neighborhood businesses in the era of Jim Crow were places blacks could go to get credit in hard times and places where they knew they would not be made to feel uncomfortable on the basis of skin color.²⁸ Through the development of such adaptive networks, the African American business community rebounded in the early 20th century, and compelled one author to conclude that by 1915 Wilmington represented a “relatively attractive business environment.”²⁹ It is important to remember that a corollary of an economic system in such a community is that neither the business owner nor the customer grew financially and both remained within a rather small circle of debt and wealth.

Further study of the African American economy of Wilmington in the early twentieth century has shown that the immediate downturns of the late 1890s and early 1900s were being reversed by the advent of the first World War.³⁰ For example, by 1915, over 31 percent of the city’s businesses were operated by blacks whereas in 1897, that figure was just over 20 percent. The most substantial growth in black businesses, evident from a study of the 1915 directory, was in the number of

²⁶ Clement Alexander Price, “Home and Hearth: The Black Town and Settlement Movement of Southern New Jersey,” in Wendel A. White, *Small Towns, Black Lives: African American Communities in Southern New Jersey* (Oceanville, New Jersey: Noyes Museum of Art, 2003), 172-173; 1900, 1910, 1920 census for Cape May County, Middle Township, New Jersey.

²⁷ According to the census, the African American population of the city increased after 1910 but at a slower rate than that of the white population. Godwin, *Black Wilmington*, 19.

²⁸ Countless oral history interviews with lifelong residents of the city recount fond memories of community support through neighbors helping neighbors in difficult times, in child rearing, economic support, church activities, and a broad spectrum of other social and cultural activities. Among the oral history interviews are those compiled by the Behind the Veil Project at Duke University.

²⁹ Kenzer, *Enterprising Southerners*, 65.

³⁰ John L. Godwin, *Black Wilmington and the North Carolina Way*, 14.